

TERRORISM

Terror: 1. intense fear. 2. a) a person or thing that causes intense fear.
b) the quality of causing dread; terribleness.

Acts of terror by individuals, groups and states are no new phenomenon. The most celebrated and complete terrorist organization originated in the Orient in the twelfth century. The sect was called the Hashishin, from whose name the word "assassin" derives. Shiek Hassan Sabbah formed a corps of men loyal to him who carried out his orders with absolute devotion. History or legend - records that he got his men's unquestioning obedience by providing them with a drug which "showed them paradise." It was hashish.

Present day terrorism has its roots in 19th century Russia when weak, isolated and desperate people turned against an all-powerful government with their weapons -- the axe and the bomb. This was the first systematic action, inspired by the inflammatory writings of Bakunin and Nechayieve, who wrote impassioned praise of the joy of destruction. Between 1870 and 1914 other terrorist

activities grew on an international scale, organized by groups who killed such diverse world leaders as the Tzar of Russia, President Carnot of France and President McKinley of the United States. However, for the forty year period before World War I, politically motivated terrorism was more than equalled by the official violence of governments.

This raises the question: What constitutes terrorism? Do all acts of violence qualify as terrorism and if not, where does legitimate force (i.e. violence) and illegitimate force (i.e. terrorism) begin?

Terrorists who fall under the "illegitimate force" category are for the most part, minority groups determined to get their rights, and until recently their activities have followed the classical patterns of terrorism -- tossing bombs into market places, etc.

However, in today's highly technical world, terrorism has evolved into methodical and thoroughly planned actions on a large scale. Modern terrorism is becoming more and more an international phenomenon. Plane hijackings, kidnappings, hostages, international assassinations, letter-bombs and other up-to-date methods are the vogue. In just a few minutes anyone can take over an airplane and threaten the lives of hundreds. Weapons have improved and

it is not inconceivable that terrorists may soon steal and use nuclear weapons.

The sources of this modern form of terrorism are several: The ease of travel; the solidarity of revolutionary movements; and most importantly, the mass media, which adds to international opinion and gives the terrorist a platform from which to speak. Publicity is the prime objective, and the more sensational the act, the more people will hear about it.

The murder of the Israeli athletes at the Munich Olympics in September 1972 is an excellent example of the use of the news media to command worldwide attention. The end sought was not so much to kill some enemies but to attract attention to the cause. The choice of the Olympic Games and the use of the mass media, with rapid transmission of the suspense of events as they occurred into the homes of hundreds of millions of people all over the world, was a textbook example of a technique of the modern day terrorist.

Furthermore, victims are no longer necessarily directly connected to a country, as evidenced by the thirty or more diplomats kidnapped over the last five years or the passengers on the three planes the fedayeen forced down in Jordan in September 1970.

Although factors such as ideologies, methods and the terrorists themselves, may differ drastically, there are several points the modern day terrorist has in common with his comrades: The terrorist seems to have an almost mythical and absolute conviction that right is on his side; this sacred "cause" permits him and makes it his duty to ignore principles of morality, in order to destroy the resistance of the "enemy." Further, terrorists share a belief that the end justifies the means. These traits were described by one journalist as "ideological criminality" for which the subject admits no guilt and has no restraint.

This modern day terrorist initially relies on techniques that are closer to kidnapping than violence, in that the terrorist often does not rely on terror per se, but rather on the horror of the deed he threatens to perpetrate. He then relies on other peoples' feelings of love and humanity for success.

There is, of course, a thin line between what constitutes a terrorist action and what is violence for violence sake. In reviewing data of several acknowledged "terrorist" activities over the last five years, including the hijackings in Jordan, the Latin American Tupamaros, the various Palestinian groups, and the prison revolt at

Attica, several common themes occur: Each was a minority group determined to get its rights; kidnapping and/or the holding of hostages was the method of psychological intimidation; the news media was used to exploit the cause internationally; and each act appeared to have been well thought out in advance. With the exception of Attica, the participants appear to have been embittered young radicals in their late teens and twenties and in many cases from middle-to-upper class backgrounds.

Although there is some evidence that the Attica revolt was instigated by a group of 30 to 40 "Maoists," the terrorist activity is perhaps more a reaction to violence imposed on the prisoners than a means to some idealistic end.

In any case, international terrorism will continue to invade even the most tranquil of countries and threaten human safety on a worldwide scale.

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